

JOHN ELIOT,

THE APOSTLE OF THE INDIANS.

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THOSE who are accustomed to read in the public papers of the extent, the power and the wealth of the American States, seldom reflect, if indeed all are aware of the fact, that, between two and three hundred years since, the land now covered by large and flourishing cities, rivalling in population many of the principal towns of Europe, and as full of animation and bustle, was by far the greater part nothing but woods and swamps,—the hunting-grounds of the savage Indian tribes, and dotted by their wigwams, rude, smoky huts scarcely capable of keeping out the wind and the rain; or it presented immense pathless plains, called prairies, something like the Steppes of Russia, where in summer the grass grew with rank luxuriance, but in winter were destitute of vegetation, hid under a thick mantle of snow, and presenting hardly any symptoms of life. The few who traversed these inhospitable and all but interminable wilds, hardly escaped with life, from the piercing keenness of the wind, which, arresting the course of the blood, almost completely checked its circulation; or if good spirits and an abundance of fit clothing enabled any such to success-

fully cope with the elements, the howls of bears and wolves must have kept up a constant alarm, not diminished by the tales so everywhere current of attacks from these fierce animals, maddened by hunger, and frequently fatal to the forlorn traveller. Yet it was to shores of desolation and to these barren wilds that many persons resorted, not from the love of excitement nor in the pursuit of gain, but to find that liberty which was denied to them at home, and which they justly prized beyond every other earthly blessing,—the liberty of worshipping the great God according to the dictates of their consciences, undeterred by human tyranny, unawed by the threats and the presence of Kings and Bishops and High-Commission Courts.

During the greater part of the reign of the two first Stuarts, as well as in the preceding one of Elizabeth, the Puritans, as they were termed, had met with most unjust and severe treatment for scrupling in the exercise of many of the rites and ceremonies of the Established Church of England, which they considered unscriptural and therefore unlawful. They were for their Nonconformity heavily fined and imprisoned; some were banished, and some suffered even death. Happy did numbers deem themselves when, by permission or connivance, or in spite of strict prohibition and search, they could quit their otherwise most dearly-beloved England, for the wild and then all but uninhabited countries of North America, there to enjoy those rights which God had given them, but of which they were cruelly deprived by the laws of man. The history of these heroic and excellent men, of whom it may truly be said the world at that time was not worthy, is full of interest and instruction, and is in no danger of being forgotten; for the Americans of the New-England States justly pride themselves on being their descendants, and keep their names in grateful remembrance. Many of them were persons of great talents and learning, of undoubted piety, and manifested ardent love for their brethren. Their preachers were remarkable for simplicity and integrity,—for untiring energy, and a solemn sense of responsibility to the great Judge of all as to the discharge of their duties. This led to many

acts, on their parts, of self-denial and zealous disinterestedness ; they watched for souls, knowing they were to give an account. Among the most pure and single-hearted, as well as devoted of these, was John Eliot, generally known as the Apostle of the Indians, whose life we proceed briefly to sketch, as presenting a bright example of what the constraining love of Christ can effect for the promotion of the everlasting interests of men,—of those even considered as the most unpromising, if not the most degraded of their kind.

John Eliot was born in England in 1604, the year after James the First came to the throne of these realms. Of his early life we have very meagre accounts ; but he appears to have been sent to the University of Cambridge when of the proper age for admission ; and we may be assured, from the tenor of his after life and the many proofs he gave of his being a sound and ripe scholar, that his college life was not spent in idleness,—that he was a conscientious and painstaking student,—and that the glory of God, shewn by an earnest desire to be useful to man, was his grand and constant aim. In the year 1631, being then about the age of twenty-seven, he came to New England, a recently chartered colony, and to which those who are reverently and fondly called “the Pilgrim Fathers,” had not many years before directed their steps. He was in company with several others of like minds and feelings with himself,—men who had hazarded their lives and sacrificed their best earthly prospects for the name and cause of the Lord Jesus,—who had cheerfully endured hardness as his faithful soldiers, and were still ready to spend and be spent in his service. They crossed the Atlantic in the chill and stormy month of November ; and on their arrival could have found few of the comforts and none of the luxuries of life,—the conveniences to which, more or less, all of them had been accustomed. A naked beach—an untilled and, in many parts, a barren soil at the commencement—a waste and howling wilderness as they advanced. The axe of the pioneer had then levelled few obstructions—the rough places had yet to be made plain—the houses and fort, more for

shelter and protection than for ornament or even comfort, had been hastily erected—fierce beasts were ready to leap the enclosures at night, and to slaughter the cattle, if not themselves—and the wild and barbarous Indian sounded the war-whoop continually, to the ears of the settlers the most dreaded cry that could be uttered. It was only the most unshaken courage, founded on strong religious principle, and upheld by a conviction that they were in the direct path of duty, that could have sustained the souls of these men under such fearful privations and trials; but they felt assured that God was their ever-present help in times of trouble, and their trust did not go unrewarded. Fearing Him, they had no other fear; for his sake, they bore, and had patience, and fainted not.

Whilst Eliot's brethren in the ministry were earnestly and faithfully labouring in their appointed calling among the settlers, and thus laying the foundation of many churches existing and flourishing to this day, his heart yearned towards the poor benighted aborigines, the men of the soil, the heathen and too much despised native Indians. He anxiously desired to win them to Christ, and he determined to devote himself, heart and soul, with all his powers of body and mind, to this great work. Twelve months after his arrival in the colony, he had been appointed as minister to a congregation of English settlers at Roxbury, near Boston, the capital of the Massachusetts province. Without at all neglecting these his more immediate friends and flock, he at once entered on his favourite work of evangelizing the heathen settlers near. About twenty tribes of these were scattered up and down amongst the colony, and to them, as a man, a brother, a disciple of Christ, he resolved on going; but the attempt was arduous, and in ordinary hands almost sure to fail. Eliot, however, was not an ordinary man. He had strong enthusiasm, without which nothing that is great or good has ever yet prospered. He had an unconquerable spirit, overflowing love, and, what was of equal consequence, wisdom, so as to shape his means to the necessary ends. He well knew that mere feelings would lead to no useful result; prudence was in-

dispensable; and that there were certain preliminaries to be gone through ere he could enter on his office. One of these was learning the language spoken by the Indians, and this was a task of much and peculiar difficulty; for it was a spoken, not a written language. The natives had no books; there was neither grammar nor dictionary to consult; and of the rules, all were alike ignorant. His method of acquiring the language, perhaps the only one he could have successfully adopted, was to take an Indian, who spake (not much, it must be presumed) the English tongue, into his family. From constant and unreserved conversation with him, Eliot learned at length to speak, to preach in, and even to make a grammar of his language.

The Indian language is perhaps unlike any other in the world, and its appearance on paper is the strangest imaginable. Its great peculiarity is in the extraordinary length of its words. Thus we have a word of *twenty-seven* letters, which signifies in English "our loves," and another of *forty-three* letters, meaning "our question." This last word contains *seventeen* syllables. There are, however, not so many letters in their alphabet as in ours. "But," says old, quaint Cotton Mather, "if their alphabet be short, I am sure the words composed of it are long enough to tire the patience of any scholar in the world. One would think they had been growing ever since Babel unto the dimensions to which they are now extended." Yet we are informed Eliot quickly mastered the language, so true is the adage that "where there is a will, there is a way;" so earnest was he in his work—so desirous that none should perish through his neglect. How does his example shame many placèd under far more favourable circumstances, who yet seem not to consider that their talents of knowledge, of time, of opportunity, are given, or rather lent to them, for the noblest purposes, that of doing good to all within the sphere of their influence, and that the Lord will at length reckon with all his servants as to the mode in which they have employed them!

The means of communication having thus been acquired, Eliot went forth on his heroic enterprize, with more exalted

and far purer feelings than ever conqueror led forth his hosts from one victory to another. His aims were high, but his heart was single. It was not to win himself a name, but to save souls; for them Christ had shed his blood, and he was an ambassador to beseech them to come and reconcile themselves to God. Yet fourteen years had elapsed from his settlement at Roxbury, ere he ventured publicly to address his heathen neighbours. The intervening time, besides the accustomed labours of his ministry, had been spent in diligent preparation; for he had been mindful of the apostolic command, to approve himself as a workman that needed not to be ashamed, and he had also sent messages to them announcing his intentions on their behalf.

At length, on 28th October, 1646, at a spot a few miles from his own house, and accompanied by three friends, who were also anxious to labour in the same cause, Eliot commenced his ministrations among the Indians. He has given us a simple but graphic narrative of his proceedings at this time, too long for insertion here, but of which the following is an abstract. Having, on approaching the settlement, met some of the chiefs, who received them very courteously, "and," as he says, "with English salutations," they proceeded to the largest wigwam, or habitation, where they found "many men, women and children gathered together from all quarters." They prayed first in English, and then finding that the discourse in the Indian tongue was likely to be well understood, Mr. Eliot preached for an hour and a quarter on the leading truths of religion, very judiciously commencing with its first principles as set forth in the Ten Commandments. He then proceeded to the elementary truths of the Gospel, urging to a reception of Christ, and to repentance "for several known sins wherein they live." Questions to them and by them were then put and answered. Three hours thus were spent in the happiest manner. A strong desire was expressed by all to see them soon again; and after promising a speedy reunion, and distributing some trifling tokens of regard—apples to the children and tobacco to the men—they separated.

The life of this excellent man was from this time mainly devoted to the Indian work. By his exertions many were brought to the knowledge of God in Christ, and walked worthy of their Christian profession. He had sufficient influence with the local government to obtain land, whereon an Indian town was built. A church was soon erected in it, and Eliot, with his Indians, laboured with their own hands to rear the edifice. He, with other ministers, regularly preached to them. His care for their welfare never intermitted. It has been already mentioned that he compiled a grammar of the language, and it is regarded, even at the present day, as a wonderful monument of his learning and perseverance. But he laid his friends of the forest under a yet more lasting obligation, by translating for their use the whole Bible,—a most astonishing work for one man, especially when we recollect his other almost ceaseless labours for their benefit. He expressed much anxiety that this work should be completed before his death. It was his legacy—the most precious he could leave—to the people of his love and care.

At length, worn by years, by labours and by privations, this apostolic man drew to the close of his earthly pilgrimage, going to the grave like a shock of corn in its due season, full of days and of honours, at the great age of eighty-six. He was laid in the tomb, mourned by the whole colony; especially lamented by those to whom he had peculiarly, and with such intense cordiality, devoted himself. The Indians revered him as an oracle, whilst they loved him as a father. He made them members of civil society, whilst he at the same time brought them to the knowledge of the Saviour. His own maxim was, “Up and be doing, and the Lord will be with thee,” and no man ever made it more self-applicable. He was at first opposed by the interested among the tribes, the sachems and the priests, who trembled for their influence or their gains. But their threats, and at times ill-usage, had no power to deter him in his work. “I am about the work of the great God, and my God is with me,” was his constant reply, and God caused his enemies at length to be at peace with him. To

civilize and convert, he would spend days and weeks with the roaming tribes, accustoming himself to all their privations, putting up with their hard and scanty fare, exposed at times shelterless to the heavy dews of night and the attacks of ravenous beasts. But Eliot's purpose was too steadfast to be moved by outward things. He was singularly disinterested in all that relates to monetary affairs, and would even give all his salary at once to a case of distress. And yet the righteous man was not forsaken; and as he ever placed his burden upon the Lord, he was cared for, and all needful things were added to him. His memory still flourishes in the land of Massachusetts; and as the honoured instrument of turning many to righteousness, he will shine among the stars of the firmament for ever.

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